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**Abstract Title:** Denial and Delay of Prisoners' Dental Care in Correctional Facilities: Public Health Risks and Legal Issues

**Abstract:** While dental care is a critical component of overall quality health care, many prisoners enter correctional facilities in the United States with little history of good dental hygiene. As a result, the incarceration experience presents opportunities for inmates to receive quality dental care. Dental care delivered by prison dentists exists within a legal environment where the state must provide adequate care to prisoners. In this paper, the Westlaw computerized database was searched, accessing 129 cases pertaining to prison dental care based on Title 42 U.S. Code Section 1983 from the U.S. Court of Appeals from 1980 to March 9, 2005. Through inductive case analysis, the paper specifies when correctional officials are most likely to be held liable for denying and delaying dental care to inmates. With respect to denial of dental care, the findings show that correctional dentists are liable when they deny care that results in (1) serious dental injury, (2) life threatening dental complications, (3) the prohibition of doctor-prescribed dental care, (4) unnecessary weight loss, and (5) lack of medication for serious dental conditions. With respect to delay of dental care, case results indicate that correctional dentists are liable when they delay care that results in (1) systemic oral health problems, (2) unneeded pain and suffering, (3) unnecessary extraction of teeth, (4) unnecessary surgical procedures, and (5) root canal that could have been prohibited. The paper concludes that the incarceration experience presents public health authorities unique opportunities to significantly improve prisoners' oral health.